



NH Speaks – An Independent Aging Agenda Event May 26, 2005

NH Speaks was held on May 26, 2005 as an independent aging agenda event. The topic discussed was maximizing a senior's ability for independent living. Beth Carrol, host of a local public TV program, moderated the discussion. Over four hundred older adults, community providers, public officials, and caregivers attended the event. A facilitated discussion was conducted at the individual tables.

The groups were asked to list challenges and obstacles NH Seniors face in regards to maximizing their ability to live independently. They were then asked to rank them in order of significance and for the top two, draft a recommendation that would help rectify the challenge/obstacle.

The following information summarizes the information gathered from NH Speaks.

1. Lack of transportation choices, availability, and affordability. Examples include: medical transportation including long distance and wheel chair accessibility

- ◆ Create a media campaign to create awareness of what is available
- ◆ Provide state and federal funding
- ◆ Create on-demand transportation services
- ◆ Allocate funds to: senior centers, companies, non-profits that have buses available to use for other purposes
- ◆ Partner with physicians, hospitals, food markets, retail stores, etc. in order for them to buy into supporting transportation initiatives.

- ◆ Utilize seniors helping seniors/use seniors who need work
- ◆ Partner with women's men's clubs
- ◆ One toll free number for information about local transportation resources
- ◆ Create tax incentives for companies and volunteers
- ◆ Develop state support system, or a central Agency to coordinate
- ◆ Enhance government assistance for bus companies
- ◆ Shift a portion of responsibility on town government.

2. Lack of housing choices, including availability

- ◆ Tax incentives to families who house their elders (property tax?)
- ◆ Build more housing
- ◆ Create incentives for facilities to accept Home and Community Based Care (HCBC) and raise HBCB funding.
- ◆ Increase HUD funding
- ◆ Enhance development of more truly affordable (low-income) housing and do this in conjunction with public transportation planning, zoning, town ordinances, and long range planning that focuses on the needs of people who are aging.

3. Financial – Expenses exceed income

- ◆ Create and build affordable housing options
- ◆ Fund more in-home care options
- ◆ Provide money management education starting at a younger age
- ◆ Create outreach/education about what financial assistance is available
- ◆ Have a way for those who don't need their social security benefit to give it back for those who do need it
- ◆ Congress/senate members should participate in Social Security, not their own pension
- ◆ More government funding for programs

4. Medication Issues – Affordability, lack of education and knowledge on how to manage medications

- ◆ Prioritize the funding of affordable health care and prescriptions by: **1.** Restructuring the health care system to: promote prevention and personal responsibility; single payer system to simplify/reduce paperwork; consistency in prescription prices at the retail level. **2.** Lower prescription costs by: an affordable Medicare prescription program; shift funds from defense (one air carrier)

5. Isolation including the difficulties on living alone

- ◆ Enhance the Senior Companion Program
- ◆ Educate older adults about senior centers and what they have to offer. Provide more outreach and increase awareness.
- ◆ Transportation
- ◆ Outreach/advocate programs that reach out to support elders within all communities for all issues – (motivate, educate, high tech)

In summary, the NH Speaks event resulted in the people of NH providing input on issues important to older adults. Although, there were many, the top five are: Transportation, Housing, Finances, Medication and Isolation. Additional recommendations included:

1. Funding should be enhanced through government sources and the private sector to meet realistic expectations.
2. A public awareness campaign should be developed to energize people at the federal, state, and community levels focusing around the principles of the Older Americans Act.
3. To help our nation eliminate, or minimize, or rectify the unfair burden of continual re-evaluation of tax increases, taxes should be frozen or adjusted for fair market value for seniors.
4. Less Government Bureaucracy
5. Lastly, we propose that there be a federal cabinet level position to focus attention on the following issues of aging, included but not limited to: health & wellness; financial security; shortage of qualified workers; funding for long term care; transportation.